

## How to answer exam questions

### A. The functions of university course exams

- you cannot answer exam questions efficiently if you are not aware of their function!

#### I. To examine your knowledge

- no successful answering of exam questions without learning...
- however, do not overestimate the importance of this function!
- difficult, since cheating is easy, and therefore less important in ONLINE EXAMS

#### II. To examine your deeper understanding of the subject matter

- because only this will qualify you as an expert
- in particular theoretical backgrounds but also practical problems in the field
- can only be assessed correctly by highly qualified examiners but will be in particular important for them
- does not require long but well thought-out answers
- more important in ONLINE EXAMS since there it is difficult to examine your knowledge

#### III. To examine important skills with regard to the subject matter

- analytical skills (think sharply)
- transfer skills (use your knowledge in different contexts)
- problem-solving skills (solve problems constructively and in line with the relevant rules, principles and values)
- the skill to apply theoretical knowledge in practice
- possible without any problems and therefore more important in ONLINE EXAMS

#### IV. To examine your presentation skills

- the skill to present your ideas in a clear and logic, dogmatically consistent structure
- the skill to present your reasoning in a clear and logic, comprehensible line of thoughts
- the skill to present all your information and ideas clearly and neatly arranged, allowing quick and easy orientation
- the skill to formulate information and ideas in a sober and precise, scientifically correct, yet understandable way
- last, but not least: the skill to make yourself understood without stealing too much precious time of the reader
- much easier with the help of your computer and therefore much higher standards in ONLINE EXAMS

#### V. To examine the achievement of the Expected Learning Outcomes (ELO) defined for the study program

- values, knowledge, specific skills and generic skills

### B. The preparation of the exam

- when learning do not focus on details but on structure and fundamentals, understanding and orientation
- study the course materials thoroughly; also consider other materials (e.g. internet resources) to which the lecturer refers
- ask questions to the lecturer (in class, via e-mail, in his office) if there are important issues you did not understand
- prepare neatly all documents and materials you are allowed to bring with you in case of an open book exam
  - note that in legal education you should always be allowed to have the text of the law with you!
  - ONLINE EXAMS are necessarily open book exams, so prepare carefully all documents, materials and links to internet resources in advance
- take drinks and snacks with you (in particular snacks with glucose and lecithin that support brain activities)
- ONLINE EXAMS require a suitable technical environment; therefore make sure that your computer works well, is not slowed down by synchronisations and software updates during the exam and enjoys a fast and stable internet connection; prepare an auxiliary internet connection via your smartphone

### C. The preparation of the writing of the answers in the exam

#### I. The need to prepare the answers before writing them down

- never start immediately to write down the answers to the exam questions!
  - a serious but common strategic mistake
- insufficient preparation before the writing down usually leads to
  - poorly structured (if not chaotic), incomplete and subsequently complemented or corrected and therefore confusing answers
  - wordy, non-focused and poorly weighted answers which cause a higher reading effort and annoy the examiner

#### II. Exact analysis of the exam questions

- otherwise you cannot answer them precisely and concisely; redundant remarks will affect the grading! (→ see infra, D.I.)
- analyse the questions thoroughly - avoid misunderstandings that will make your answer useless!
- pay attention to a special notice that may elucidate the question

### III. Brainstorming and drawing up of a draft outline

- gather spontaneous ideas on a separate sheet of paper (in ONLINE EXAMS on your computer) during the analysis of the questions; this prevents that important thoughts and ideas get lost
- set up a framework in the form of an exactly tuned outline of your answer on the separate sheet of paper
  - focus on an appropriate, clear and logic, dogmatically consistent structure and a comprehensible line of thoughts, which allows easy orientation; note that a chaotic or inconsistent order of thoughts can make your answer useless!
  - split up complex questions into separate sub-questions, which may be easier to handle
  - plan the presentation with the help of the draft outline, noting all elements (information, reasoning etc.) at the right place
- update the draft outline constantly
- plan thoroughly in order to avoid subsequent complementations or corrections that leave a very bad impression

### IV. Time management

- plan the amount of time you want to spend on the individual questions and on the individual aspects within the answers to them
  - this shall prevent that you waste too much time on not so important aspects at the beginning but later the necessary time for important parts is missing
  - plan with regard to the points offered for each question but also to your skills and knowledge
  - allow for at least 5 minutes reserve (maybe more in an ONLINE EXAM)
- check later frequently if there is still enough time and correct your time planning realistically at an early stage

## D. The writing down

### I. Answering the questions precisely and concisely

- make sure that your text answers exactly what is asked for (→ see supra, C.II.) and is confined to it!
  - it is not admissible to simply write down what you have learnt
  - redundant remarks on other topics dilute your answers, cause unnecessary additional work for the examiner and therefore will result in a deduction of points

### II. Focusing on the main aspects

- avoid an imbalanced presentation!

### III. Structuring the text by well-coordinated, precise headlines

- often ingored but important to allow quick and easy orientation
  - unstructured long text blocks are unacceptable in in academic writing and in exam papers!
- within the answer of the same question the system of headlines must be logically and dogmatically consistent
- a practical tip: start the answer for each exam question with a new sheet of paper; this avoids confusion and allows to write down the answer in a different order than their later arrangement

### IV. Exact reasoning

- reveal, which legal methods you apply in your legal reasoning and why (legal interpretation, analogy, further development of law? Which method of legal interpretation?)

### V. Objective and precise style of writing

- essential for any legal writing - also in exam papers and also in foreign languages!
- formulate as exactly as possible, with precise terms and smart and correct use of prepositions, conjunctions, verbs etc.
- do not use emotional expressions, strong language or exaggerations ("certainly", "of course", "without doubts", "very" etc.)
  - they do not compensate for shortcomings in your reasoning but rather point to them!
- do not use subjective style ("we...", "I..." etc.) in any scientific or legal writing!
- specify legal norms as exactly as possible (article, section, sub-section, no., lit. etc.)
- underline (format in ONLINE EXAMS in italics or bold) important keywords (because many examiners are searching for them...)
- *formulate in your own words* - never "copy and paste", not even from the course materials!

### VI. Appealing form

- form does matter in an exam paper - for many examiners it proves the professional sovereignty of the writer
- avoid confusing addenda and side notes since they may irritate the examiner
- write legibly even in a hurry since readability problems are at the expense of the student
- note that the standards are considerably higher in ONLINE EXAMS where you can use your computer!

## E. The final check

- reserve 5 minutes (maybe more in an ONLINE exam) for a final check - you will lose little time but may gain much!
- Does your text really answer the questions and does it become apparent?
- Is something important missing?
- Have you processed all important ideas noted at the beginning on the separate sheet of paper during the brainstorming?
- Have you arranged all sheets of paper in the right order and numbered them correctly?
- verify in an ONLINE EXAM if your answer has been sent or arrived; keep a copy with the metadata or a screenshot for documentation